

Saint-Gaudens Memorial, Inc.
Opportunities Study/Request for Proposals
Blow-Me-Down Farm
Cornish, New Hampshire

(PDF version available at www.sgnhs.org)



Incorporated in 1919, the Saint-Gaudens Memorial, Inc. (Memorial) is a nonprofit organization established to maintain a “living memorial” to the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848-1907) on the site of his home and studios in Cornish, New Hampshire. In 1965, the site was donated by the Memorial to the National Park Service (NPS) to form the Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site (SGNHS), the first national park dedicated to a visual artist. Today, the Memorial continues in existence as a nonprofit operating partner of SGNHS and serves to advise and assist the park, and sponsor programs and activities that promote Augustus Saint-Gaudens, his work, and sculpture in general.

Introduction

The intent of this Opportunities Study/Request for Proposals is to solicit a wide range of proposals for the 48-acre property known as Blow-Me-Down Farm. It is intentionally broad to allow for proposals that might suggest creative and appropriate new uses, new partnerships with the Memorial and/or SGNHS, as well as private ownership and/or lease options for this historic property.

Background

Due to the historic significance of Blow-Me-Down Farm and its close association with Augustus Saint-Gaudens, the NPS identified the entire property for acquisition by SGNHS in the proposed action of the park’s 1996 General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (GMP).

In 1996, a benefactor interested in the preservation of the Blow-Me-Down Farm and its historic legacy, made funds available for acquisition of the property. The Site could not take ownership at that time, as it did not have the requisite congressional authorizations, so the Memorial, the park's nonprofit partner, purchased Blow-Me-Down Farm with the donated funds (the needed congressional authorizations have subsequently been put in place that allow for NPS acceptance of the property). The intention regarding ownership was that the property would be held for future purchase by the NPS, or alternatively that all or part of the property might be used/leased/cooperatively held under an arrangement between the Memorial and the Site, and possibly other organizations. The intention with respect to function is that the property will be preserved, development limited, and that future uses will further and/or complement the goals and work of the SGNHS and the Memorial.

During the acquisition process, the former owners of Blow-Me-Down Farm were granted life-tenancy of the property with an arrangement that they maintain it, as well as continue to pay property taxes to the Town of Cornish, NH. The former owners of the property relinquished their life-tenancy at the end of 2006. At present, there are short-term rental agreements in place for two of the structures at Blow-Me-Down Farm.

Current Status

The NPS has indicated a desire to acquire a portion of Blow-Me-Down Farm for its use as indicated in the park's GMP. Specifically, the NPS would like to acquire approximately half of the parcel, including the Red Barn, Chauncey Cottage, some river frontage and a right-of-way access across the northern section of the property to Route 12A. (See map page 9).

With this in mind, the Memorial is putting out this RFP as a means of:

1. Exploring partnership opportunities at Blow-Me-Down Farm that may enhance the mission of the park and ensure the long-term preservation of the property; and
2. Investigating additional compatible options and arrangements for the Farm including long-term lease and/or sale.



Winter View of Agricultural Fields, Connecticut River, and Mt. Ascutney

Setting

Blow-Me-Down Farm is located directly on the Connecticut River and faces Mt. Ascutney in neighboring Vermont. The 48-acre property has significant views of the Connecticut River, an American Heritage River, and is located just upstream and within view of the longest covered bridge in the nation, the Cornish/Windsor Covered Bridge, a National Engineering Landmark on the National Register of Historic Places. To the east the property abuts SGNHS and to the south land owned by the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department that has a public boat/fishing access on the Connecticut River. The entire length of the shared New Hampshire and Vermont border, as defined by the Connecticut River, has recently been designated as a National Scenic Byway. The environmental significance of the area was also recognized with the 1991 establishment of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish & Wildlife Refuge, which encompasses the entire Connecticut River Watershed.

Cornish, NH is a rural community with approximately 1,700 residents located in what is regionally known as the Upper Valley. It is nestled between the small cities of Lebanon, NH and Claremont, NH, each of which contains approximately 13,000 residents. Hanover, NH, home of Dartmouth College, is just to the north of Lebanon, NH. Windsor, VT is located across the Cornish/Windsor Covered Bridge, about a mile from the Blow-Me-Down Farm.

Historic Significance

The Blow-Me-Down Farm was the historic home of Charles C. Beaman, a New York City lawyer who was responsible for bringing Augustus Saint-Gaudens and many others to Cornish, NH, indirectly establishing what would become known as the “Cornish Colony.”

The Cornish Colony was comprised of an extraordinary group of visual artists, writers, architects, landscape designers, musicians, art patrons and public figures who lived and worked in Cornish and Plainfield, NH from 1885 until 1935. The group included such notable people as Maxfield Parrish, Stephen Parrish, Ethel Barrymore, Percy Mackaye, Ellen Shipman, Paul Manship, Thomas and Maria Dewing, Charles Adams Platt, novelist Winston Churchill, and many others. Cornish, NH even served as the location for President Woodrow Wilson’s summer White House for three years.

The adjacent Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site was established by Congress in 1964, after the Memorial’s donation of the land, historic structures and collection of Saint-Gaudens’ art to the federal government. The purpose of the SGNHS is to preserve, interpret, and exhibit historically significant resources associated with the life and cultural achievements of August Saint-Gaudens (1848-1907), one of America’s foremost sculptors. The 148-acres site consists of his historic home, gardens, grounds, and studios, with over 100 examples of his original artwork on display and over 10,000 objects within its museum collections.

Buildings and Grounds

The Memorial intends to respect BMDF as an historic property and will look, in proposals received, for a commitment to restore and maintain the historic buildings located here.

Casino/Main House - Today, the main residence at Blow-Me-Down Farm is an expanded version of what was once known as Charles Beaman's "Casino," a building that had served as somewhat of a social center for the Cornish Colony. Following a fire that destroyed Beaman's main house, the three-story Casino was expanded and has since served as the primary residence. The house consists of three floors, seven bedrooms, seven bathrooms, dining room, an industrial kitchen, and numerous other rooms.



Dance Hall on left, Casino/Main House on right

Dance Hall – Located adjacent to the Casino/Main House, the one-story Dance Hall contains a 2,500 square foot dance room, along with a chaperone's sitting room. The building includes a center cupola and a large fireplace, as well as a wood stove. At present, there is no other source of heat for the building, thus its use is seasonal in nature.

Red Barn – The magnificent four-story red barn was constructed by Charles Beaman in 1884. The Stabilization, re-roofing and repairs were completed by the Saint-Gaudens Memorial in 1999. The building is an important aesthetic feature of the property and has potential for a variety of uses. This building is located within the parcel that may be acquired and/or used by the NPS. The NPS anticipates future use of the building as an orientation center for the SGNHS and Cornish Colony, as well as space for public programs, exhibitions, storage, offices, and artist's studios.



Swimming Pool – An in-ground swimming pool, a late addition, is located adjacent to the Casino/Main House and the Dance Hall.

Chauncey Cottage – This building served as the former estate manager's cottage and is presently occupied by on-site caretakers under a short-term lease agreement. The structure contains three bedrooms and a large sun porch and is located in the southeast portion of the property (see map page 9), which may be acquired and/or used by the NPS. SGNHS uses of the Cottage may include housing for an expanded artist-in-residence program or for seasonal

employees/volunteers, or the NPS may utilize the space for offices or explore various leasing options.

Playhouse – The property includes a small children’s playhouse that is currently in need of restoration.

Blacksmith Shop – The blacksmith shop is a typical farm structure with a sloped roof and a row of windows. The structure might suit a number of uses including serving as an artist’s studio or it could be used for storage.

Butler Building - This is a large, 18,750 square foot, metal building that was originally constructed as a horse riding arena. For the past several years the building served as the main terminal for the construction company that was operated by the previous owner of Blow-Me-Down Farm. At present the building is being leased on a short-term basis by another construction company. The Memorial’s intention is that this non-historic structure be **eventually** removed.

Grounds – The agricultural past of the Blow-Me-Down Farm is still maintained, as much of the lower riverside terrace of the property is currently annually leased to and planted by a local farmer. Of the property’s 48.4 total acres, 33.4 of these acres are in the New Hampshire Current Use program. This includes 18 acres of agricultural land and 15.4 acres of forest. The remaining acreage surrounds the developed portion of the property that includes the various structures. Much of the formal gardens and terraced landscaping adjacent to the Casino/Main House has been lost over time, though the potential for restoration is great. The property affords some of the most magnificent views in Cornish of Mt. Ascutney across the Connecticut River in Vermont.

Land Protection

Currently, there are no formal conservation or preservation easements on Blow-Me-Down Farm. The Memorial is focused on assuring the long-term preservation of Blow-Me-Down Farm, as this was a key consideration of the original funding donor. The Memorial anticipates putting into place a number of easements and/or deed restrictions including, for example:

- Providing deeded right-of-way access for an owner/user of the northern portion of the property to the southernmost point of BMDF for the purpose of accessing the Connecticut River for such activities such as canoeing or fishing (riverbank along the northern portion of the property is quite steep).
- Scenic easements that maintain a view of Mt. Ascutney to the west and views south down the Connecticut River) from the property, as well as other view corridors within the property, such as views of the river from the house. The latter might entail continued agricultural planting of, or maintained hay or grass in the fields between the main house and the river.
- Restricting the removal of, or substantial reconfiguration of, the Casino/Main House and associated Dance Hall. Compatible capital improvement projects and ongoing restoration/preservation would be allowed. Upon removal of the Butler building, the

easement might allow for some new construction that is compatible with the land and the existing historic structures on the northern portion of the property.

- Providing right-of-way access and use by NPS or other owner/user of the southern portion of the parcel for vehicular access across the northern portion of the property to Route 12A. The southern historic entrance to BMDF is located on a sharp bend of Route 12A that does not provide safe sightlines for possible NPS or other public uses, that is non-residential in nature.

The easements would be held and monitored by the NPS/Memorial or a nonprofit land trust.

Local and Regional Perspective

At the local level in Cornish, as elsewhere in the state, there are public concerns regarding the potential loss in revenue if the property were to be acquired by the federal government and/or a charitable organization and removed from the property tax rolls.

In a broader regional perspective, there is considerable interest in land protection by both residents and organizations in the Upper Valley. This includes organizations such as the Upper Valley Land Trust and the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests. Each of these nonprofit institutions has been involved in protecting significant tracts of land in and around Cornish.

The Upper Valley community also fosters great interest in the arts, as is evidenced by organizations such as the Upper Valley Arts Alliance, a local volunteer organization whose focus is to make the performing, visual and literary arts a vital and accessible part of everyday life in the Upper Valley. The Upper Valley is home to numerous art galleries, performing arts organizations, and museums, as well as a variety of nonprofit groups such as Vital Communities and Historic Windsor, Inc/Preservation Education Institute.

Property Use Considerations

The Town of Cornish has zoning regulations that cover multiple and single property uses, and may restrict commercial and retail development that goes beyond that of a home business, such as a Bed and Breakfast. It is the intent of the Memorial that the Blow-Me-Down Farm continues to retain the historic Cornish Colony home and agricultural appearance that has existed since the property was owned by Charles Beaman.

Future of Blow-Me-Down Farm/Request for Proposals

To ensure the long-term protection of the Blow-Me-Down Farm and to help the Memorial accomplish its mission to provide support to the SGNHS, the Memorial has opted to consider proposals from individuals and organizations that are compatible with and further the missions of both the Memorial and SGNHS.

There are a number of uses for the property that may be compatible with the Cornish zoning regulations, as well the missions of the Memorial and SGNHS; examples of such include the following:

- Development of an artist residency program
- Use by an Arts organization
- Use by a Land Trust or Environmental organization
- Other nonprofit NGO's
- Partnership with federal or state agency
- Bed and Breakfast
- Private use/ownership – residence
- Small farm operation
- Long-term lease or purchase arrangement for any of the above

Other creative suggestions are welcomed.

Proposals are primarily being sought for the northern portion of the property; however, the Memorial is also willing to consider proposals for the entire 48-acres. Proposals for the entirety of BMDF need to accommodate collaborative use by, and a partnership arrangement with, the NPS/Memorial for its future programming and operational needs.

Proposals that include direct purchase/private ownership of either the northern portion or the entire property should take into consideration that, in the event of future sale of any portion of the property, it is the objective of the Memorial that the NPS will have a purchase option on said lands, or the Memorial a repurchase option, at the then-prevailing fair market value. Such language will be incorporated into the property deed and sale agreements.

Financial Considerations

There are a number of financial considerations that should be addressed within proposals. Current annual heating and utility costs for the Main House (Casino) are up to \$10,000 (for existing systems). The main house is also in need of substantial capital improvements and preservation including repairs and upgrades to windows, electrical systems, septic, exterior and interior paint, and other finishes.

If proposals do not include a temporary, compatible new use for the Butler Building, it is the intent of the Memorial that the structure be removed and proposals should include the cost of its removal.

Numerous outbuildings are also in need of repair and maintenance.

Property taxes to the Town of Cornish, NH for the entire 48.4-acre Blow-Me-Down Farm were \$17,217 in 2006. Property taxes for a portion of the property would be determined by the Town of Cornish, NH, pending future disposition and action by the Memorial on this property parcel.

Proposal Evaluation Criteria

The guidelines for developing proposals for Blow-Me-Down Farm have intentionally been made in very general terms in order to ensure the inclusion of broad and creative thinking in terms of envisioning uses for the property. When evaluating proposals, the Memorial will take into account its own mission, as well as that of SGNHS. Proposals should address the following topics:

- Long-term preservation including restoration/rehabilitation/maintenance of existing structures
- Uses compatible with SGNHS
- Access to, use, or acquisition of the southern part of the property by the NPS, as applicable
- Boundaries of the property for which the proposal is being made
- Financial Information
 - Long-term lease proposals should include the proposed length of lease, terms, capital preservation improvements, annual maintenance activities, and proposed annual lease amount
 - Purchase proposals should include proposed amount of purchase, capital preservation improvements, and considerations for NPS right-of-way to the southern portion of the property
- Whether proposals include other (potentially tax-deductible) supporting, one-time or ongoing gifts to the Memorial or SGNHS

Selection of a proposal does not imply immediate or full acceptance of proposed uses and/or financial terms, but indicates a willingness on the part of the Memorial to enter into further conversations and negotiation with the applicant.

Proposal Submission Process

The Saint-Gaudens Memorial is seeking proposals from groups or individuals describing their interest, programmatic intent, and general objectives regarding financial arrangements. Deadline for submission is June 11, 2007. Please provide one copy to each of the following:

Saint-Gaudens Memorial
17 East 47th Street
New York, NY 10017

BJ Dunn, Superintendent
Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site
139 Saint-Gaudens Road
Cornish, NH 03745

Questions regarding this Request for Proposals may be directed to Lisa Niven, Executive Director, Saint-Gaudens Memorial at SGMemorial@aol.com.

Those who are seriously considering submitting a proposal may arrange a site visit of Blow-Me-Down Farm, by contacting BJ Dunn, Superintendent, Saint-Gaudens NHS at (603) 675-2175 x143 or by email BJ_Dunn@nps.gov.

References:

This Land of Pure Delight – Charles C. Beaman and Blowmedown Farm by John Dryfhout

General Management Plan/Development Concept Plan/Environmental Impact Statement for Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1996

On the Web:

Saint-Gaudens Memorial – <http://www.sgnhs.org>

Saint-Gaudens NHS – <http://www.nps.gov/saga>

Cornish, NH - <http://www.cornishnh.net/>

Blow-Me-Down Farm

